



The Sixty-eighth Season of
The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lamot Belin
Concerts

National Gallery of Art
2,770th Concert

Míceál O'Rourke, pianist
Stephen Ackert, narrator

February 21, 2010
Sunday, 6:30 pm
East Building Auditorium

Admission free

Program

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

Préludes, Book I (1907–1910)

Lent et grave... Danseuses de Delphes (Delphic dancers)

Modéré... Voiles (Sails)

Animé... Le vent dans la plaine (The wind on the plain)

Modéré... “Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l’air du soir”
(Sounds and scents swirl in the evening air)

Très modéré... Les collines d’Anacapri (The hills of Anacapri)

Triste et lent... Des pas sur la neige (Footprints in the snow)

Animé et tumultueux... Ce qu’a vu le vent d’ouest
(What the west wind saw)

Très calme et doucement expressif... La fille aux cheveux de lin
(The girl with flaxen hair)

Modérément animé... La sérénade interrompue
(The interrupted serenade)

Profondément calme... La cathédrale engloutie
(The submerged cathedral)

Capricieux et léger... La danse de Puck (Puck’s dance)

Modéré... Minstrels

The Musicians

MÍCEÁL O'ROURKE

Internationally regarded as the leading interpreter of the music of Dublin-born composer John Field (1782–1837), Irish pianist Míceál O'Rourke is equally at home with the music of Chopin, Debussy, Ravel, and numerous other composers. O'Rourke graduated from University College, Dublin, and pursued his musical studies in Antwerp and Paris, where he now lives. He studied piano under Marcel Ciampi, a pupil of Debussy. Since 1976, when O'Rourke gave his first public recital in France, he has built a career as a highly respected performer, playing at major venues including the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, the National Concert Hall in Dublin, Philharmonia Hall in Saint Petersburg, Queen Elizabeth Hall and Royal Festival Hall in London, Salle Pleyel in Paris, and Symphony Hall in Boston, as well the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the National Gallery of Art. His most recent performances with orchestra include concertos by Ravel and Mozart with the Saint Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra, concertos by Field with the Moscow Symphony Orchestra, and Rachmaninoff's third piano concerto with the National Symphony Orchestra in Dublin. His performance of the Rachmaninoff with the Boston Symphony Orchestra earned the following praise from the reviewer for the *Boston Globe*: "A tremendous virtuoso, playing with the simplicity of a child singing."

O'Rourke's command of a wide variety of styles is reflected in his extensive discography on the Chandos label. His eight best-selling CDs featuring the music of John Field have won many awards, including the Classic CD Award (Great Britain), Disques de l'Année of *Le Monde de la Musique* (France), and Penguin Awards (Great Britain). He has also recorded albums of works by Chopin, Debussy, and Schumann and world premiere recordings of works by George Frederic Pinto (1786–1806) and Michele Esposito (1855–1929). O'Rourke's televised recordings of Chopin's complete nocturnes have been broadcast throughout Australia, Europe, and the United States, and he has introduced two generations of music lovers to the

music of John Field through his recordings of that composer's complete piano concerti, sonatas, and nocturnes. In 1994 he was awarded the prestigious Chopin Medal by the Warsaw Frederic Chopin Society in recognition of his "outstanding Chopin playing"—the first and only pianist to date to be so honored. Mícheál O'Rourke appears at the National Gallery by arrangement with John Gingrich Management, Inc., of New York City.

STEPHEN ACKERT

Stephen Ackert is the head of the music department at the National Gallery of Art and a member of the music faculty of Northern Virginia Community College in Alexandria, Virginia. He studied the organ at Oberlin College Northwestern University, and the Hochschule für Musik in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, where his teachers were Helmut Walcha and Maria Jaeger-Jung. Ackert completed his doctoral studies in organ in 1974 at the University of Wisconsin in Madison (USA). From 1974 to 1978 he had the unique opportunity to work as a professional musician in Iran, serving as music advisor and resident keyboard artist of the National Iranian Radio and Television Network. A resident of the Washington, D.C., area since 1979, Ackert has performed on organ, harpsichord, and piano in many of its prime venues, including the Kennedy Center, the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, the National Cathedral, and the German Embassy. In 2007 he undertook his eighth recital tour of historic concert halls and churches in Germany.

In addition to administering the National Gallery's concert series, Ackert lectures on interrelationships between music and art. Since 1990 his talks have been a part of the National Gallery's programming. He has also presented them at the Austrian and German embassies, the Kennedy Center, the San Antonio Museum of Art, and the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore.

Program Notes

A denizen of Paris for all but a few months of his life, Claude Debussy was surrounded by the vibrant community of artists who also chose Paris as a place to live and work. They recognized it as the world's primary center for the visual arts, a ranking it held well into the twentieth century. He was profoundly influenced by this environment, as evidenced by his music and what he wrote about it in letters and program notes. Each of Debussy's *Préludes, Book I* (1907–1910) is a short but substantial work that conveys a particular mood or impression suggested by its title. Even though he subscribed to the “theory of correspondences”—an aspect of symbolist thought that equates creative activity in music with creative activity in poetry and the visual arts—as formulated by Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), Debussy was wary of any labeling of his pieces as mere illustrations or impressions. The references to visual images that appear in his manuscript for the *Préludes, Book I*, are added as a subtitle at the end of each *Prélude*, a kind of footnote. In other writings, he vigorously defended his *Préludes*, and indeed all of his music, as “pure music.”

Through his studies in the late 1960s with the celebrated French pianist and teacher Marcel Ciampi, Míceál O'Rourke gained a unique insight into the Debussy *Préludes*. Ciampi was one of the last students of Debussy, giving him the unique opportunity to study these works with the composer. He made careful notes on the comments he received from his teacher, and the scores that were used in those lessons contain subtle supplementary indications that were written in the margins by Debussy himself. Ciampi allowed O'Rourke to make copies of the notes and the scores, and the unique information they contain has served as the basis for O'Rourke's interpretation of the *Préludes* in performances and recordings.

Ciampi's notes include some specific comments from Debussy about the subtitles he applied to the *Préludes*. Some were inspired by poems: “Le vent de la plaine [suspend son haleine]” (The wind on the plain holds its breath) comes from one of Paul Verlaine's (1844–1896) “Romances sans paroles” (1873). “Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir” (Sounds

and scents swirl in the evening air) comes from Baudelaire's "Harmonie du soir" from the collection *Fleurs du mal* (1857).

"Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest" (What the west wind saw) is not a quote, but refers to these lines from one of Debussy's favorite poems by Charles Grandmougin (1850–1930):

At night in the mayhem of the tempest,
Who can tell if the clamor rising to the heavens
Is not the searing cry
Of souls in anguish?

"La fille aux cheveux de lin" (The girl with flaxen hair) is a line from Leconte de Lisle's (1818–1894) "Chanson ecossaise:"

Whence comes that song this chilly morning?
'Tis the girl with flaxen hair, the girl with cherry lips.

In other examples, the subtitle refers to a visual image that had special appeal for Debussy. "Danseuses de Delphes" is the French name for a famous artifact of ancient Greek sculpture—three figures in high relief above a column of acanthus found in 1894 near the Sanctuary of Pythian Apollo at Delphi. Debussy knew this sculpture in reproduction. *Voiles* (Sails) and *La cathédrale engloutie* (The submerged cathedral) call to mind scenes at the seaside, a favorite place of respite for the composer. At the turn of the twentieth century, boats with sails still outnumbered motorized craft in any port or marina, and many of them sported brightly colored sails. Debussy captures both the motion and the colors of this scene. The submerged cathedral recalls a legend of the port city of Ys, where fishermen tell how, at dawn, under certain atmospheric conditions, a great cathedral surges up out of the sea, its bells pealing and its organ thundering. As it sinks back into the water, the echoes of its sounds are slow to fade away.

Program notes by Stephen Ackert

Next Week at the National Gallery of Art

Harold Jones, flutist
Peter Vinograd, pianist

Music by Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson
and other composers

Presented in honor of
African American History Month

February 24, 2010
Wednesday, 12:10 pm
West Building Lecture Hall



)musica(aperta

Music by Bizet, Buononcini, Gabrieli,
Golijov, Ortiz, and Shostakovich

Presented in honor of
The Sacred Made Real:
Spanish Painting and Sculpture, 1600–1700

February 28, 2010
Sunday, 6:30 pm
West Building, West Garden Court

For the convenience of concertgoers
the Garden Café remains open until 6:00 pm.

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the
performance is not allowed. Please be sure that cell phones,
pagers, and other electronic devices are turned off.

Please note that late entry or reentry of
the West Building after 6:30 pm is not permitted.

Music Department
National Gallery of Art
Sixth Street and Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC

Mailing address
2000B South Club Drive
Landover, MD 20785

www.nga.gov